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8. If there is a film canon, to what extent does it reflect a summation of various scholastic and political/ideological influences, such as feminism, multiculturalism, and post-colonialism?

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Nichols: It evolves and reflects the thinking of the time when it is created. See the AFI's 100 this and that lists over time.

Miller: I can't answer this query without undertaking a survey of undergraduate courses worldwide to establish whether your presumption is correct.

Tryon: Instead of a single film canon, I would argue that there are several canons. Organizations such as the American Film Institute combine the tastes of professional film critics with internet voting to produce a populist canon, while film scholars, more attentive to formal innovation and experimental technique, often teach other films, creating an implicit canon in the Introduction to Film courses that are often popular electives at colleges and universities across the country; and rather than seeing one canon as necessarily better, these debates over what counts as a "great" film or as worthy of study, which may, of course, be two very distinct categories, can tell us much about how taste is constructed.

Much like the debates over the literary canon, there has been some discussion of whether we should use a film's politics as a criterion for evaluating it or whether we should judge a film on its aesthetic merits or its influence on future filmmaking practices instead. For example, in the most recent AFI Top 100 list, D.W. Griffith's influential [Birth of a Nation](#) dropped precipitously, suggesting that the film's overt racism obscured its formal and stylistic innovations for most voters. Meanwhile, film scholars have often turned to neglected genres, such as the melodrama, reshaping the status of certain films and filmmakers in both scholarly and popular canons.

It is worth adding that the AFI list functions, in large part, as a means for marketing DVDs as collectible artifacts. And yet, even though I find many of the selections on the list disappointing, if not baffling ([Forrest Gump](#), [Titanic](#), and [The Shawshank Redemption](#), among others), such lists have the valuable effect of sparking conversation. The AFI's 2007 Top 100 list, for example, led to widespread discussion among film critics and bloggers and inspired a number of people to produce their own lists. Such activity should not be dismissed as the idle chatter of cinephiles with too much time on their hands.¹

Notes:

1 See, for example, the extensive discussion at Edward Copeland's blog <http://eddieonfilm.blogspot.com/2007/06/100-reasons-for->

[another-tv-list-special.html](#).

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